

a Rheumatologist is a specialist physician who has expertise in diagnosing and treating diseases of the joints, muscles and bones.

Sometimes the term rheumatic disease is used to describe this group of diseases.

The more common rheumatic diseases include:

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|-------------------|--------------------------|
| JOINT DISEASE     | ■ Arthritis              |
|                   | ■ Gout                   |
|                   | ■ Spinal problems        |
|                   | ■ Osteoarthritis         |
| MUSCLES & TENDONS | ■ Fibromyalgia           |
|                   | ■ Polymyalgia rheumatica |
|                   | ■ Tendonitis             |
| BONE DISEASE      | ■ Osteoporosis           |
|                   | ■ Paget's disease        |

There are also a number of rarer rheumatic conditions which can affect other parts of the body including the skin, hair and internal organs. These include “lupus”, myositis, vasculitis and scleroderma.

# WHAT WILL HAPPEN WHEN I SEE THE RHEUMATOLOGIST?

## THE DIAGNOSIS

Your rheumatologist is specially trained to do the detective work necessary to discover the cause of your symptoms. He or she will usually ask you to explain the history of the problem and will undertake a physical examination. Additional investigations such as blood tests, X-rays and scans may also be needed.

## INFORMATION AND ADVICE

Once a diagnosis is made, your rheumatologist will explain the nature of your illness and what you might expect in the future. This is an important step, particularly for illnesses which might affect you over a long period.

## TREATMENT

With an accurate diagnosis and a shared understanding of your illness, you and your rheumatologist can work together to design a treatment program aimed at managing pain, reducing inflammation and ensuring your quality of life.

## ONGOING MANAGEMENT

Depending on the nature of your illness, you may need to see your rheumatologist regularly for ongoing management. Alternatively you may be treated by your general practitioner, with the rheumatologist on hand for specialist advice.

# SO HOW WILL MY CONDITION BE TREATED?

As your rheumatologist will explain, there are a number of treatment options available including:

- PHYSICAL THERAPY
- GENERAL SUPPORTIVE CARE
- DRUG TREATMENT AND SURGERY

He or she will select the best treatment combination for you, depending on the exact nature of your illness and your other individual needs.

In treating and managing your illness, your rheumatologist will work closely with your GENERAL PRACTITIONER as well as other skilled professionals to ensure you get the best possible care:

The PHYSIOTHERAPIST is trained in the physical treatment of rheumatic disorders and uses a combination of exercise, special treatment techniques and advice.

The OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST provides advice on how to get on with day-to-day activities such as working, dressing and getting out and about.

The PSYCHOLOGIST OR SOCIAL WORKER offers advice and support to help patients and families cope with the changes that illness might bring.

NURSES, PODIATRISTS AND DIETITIANS may also form part of the team involved in your treatment.

